

Message Text

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PAGE 01 MADRID 06390 140905Z

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FM AMEMBASSY MADRID
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INFO AMCONSUL BILBAO

C O N F I D E N T I A L MADRID 6390

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, SP

SUBJ: SPANISH INTERNAL SITUATION: BASQUE PROBLEM

1. AMCONSUL BILBAO HAS DONE A THOUGHTFUL ASSESSMENT, SUMMARIZED BELOW, OF THE CURRENT SECURITY AND POLITICAL ASPECTS OF THE BASQUE PROBLEM (BILBAO'S A-14 OF SEPT. 5, 1975).

2. THE BASQUES OF NORTHERN SPAIN, WITH THEIR UNIQUE LANGUAGE AND UNKNOWN ORIGIN, HAVE LONG ASPIRED TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE OR AUTONOMY. THEY RETAINED A DEGREE OF AUTONOMY UNTIL 1937 WHEN THE LAST VESTIGES OF THEIR TRADITIONAL SPECIAL RIGHTS WERE WITHDRAWN FROM THE TWO MOST SEPARATIST PROVINCES FOR HAVING BEEN ON THE WRONG SIDE IN THE CIVIL WAR. ASPIRATIONS TOWARD AUTONOMY AND REPRESSION BY THE SPANISH GOVERNMENT LED TO THE FORMATION OF SEPARATIST ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS THE BASQUE NATIONALIST PARTY AND LATER THE MORE VIOLENT ETA WHICH HAS CLAIMED OR BEEN ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITY FOR AN INCREASING NUMBER OF ASSASSINATIONS, BOMBINGS AND BANK ROBBERIES. ETA HAS BEEN CHARGED WITH 26 ASSASSINATIONS DURING THE PAST YEAR. ETA TERRORISM HAS PROVOKED COUNTER TERRORISM BY RIGHTIST GROUPS (WIDELY BELIEVED AMONG THE BASQUES TO BE LINKED TO THE POLICE) AND THE DECLARATION OF A MODIFIED STATE OF SIEGE IN THE

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PAGE 02 MADRID 06390 140905Z

BASQUE PROVINCES. (NOW REPLACED BY A NATION-WIDE ANTI-TERRORIST

DECREE LAW.) THE ARREST AND IMPRISONMENT OF HUNDREDS OF ETA SUSPECTS (COUPLED WITH REPORTS OF TORTURE), ACCOMPANIED BY FREQUENT SEARCHES AND HARASSMENT OF PEOPLE IN PUBLIC PLACES, HAVE CAUSED INCREASING RESENTMENT AMONG THE BASQUES.

3. THERE HAVE BEEN RECENT SIGNS THAT THE SPANISH GOVERNMENT IS BEGINNING TO RECOGNIZE THE NEED FOR A POLITICAL SOLUTION, BUT THERE IS LITTLE CHANCE OF THE FRANCO GOVERNMENT EVER GAINING BASQUE SUPPORT. SHOULD A POST-FRANCO GOVERNMENT MOVE TOWARD A PLURALIST SYSTEM, THIS MIGHT GO A LONG WAY TOWARD NEUTRALIZING THE PASSIVE SYMPATHY AND SOMETIMES ACTIVE SUPPORT WHICH OTHERWISE LAWABIDING BASQUES NOW PROVIDE THE ETA TERRORISTS. ADDITIONALLY, AMNESTY TO BASQUES IMPROBSED ON MINOR CHARGES AND PERHAPS THE LEGITIMIZATION OF A REGIONAL BASQUE POLITICAL PARTY UNDER SPECIFIED CONDITIONS WOULD BE NECESSARY. FINALLY, THE VESTIGES OF BASQUE RIGHTS EMBODIED IN THE SPECIAL TAX ADMINISTRATION ARRANGEMENTS (CONCIERTO ECONOMICO), WHICH WAS ABOLISHED IN 1937, WOULD PROBABLY HAVE TO BE RESTORED TO VIZCAYA AND GUIPUZCOA OR WITHDRAWN FROM ALAVA AND NAVARRA (WHICH RETAINED THEM AFTER THE CIVIL WAR), SINCE THIS DISCRIMINATION PERPETUATES A STATE OF PUNISHMENT.

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